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PEQUOT

NONDENOMINATIONAL COLLEGE
NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT

STOCKS TRAILS

NOVEMBER 1964 DEC. 28 1964



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MYSTIC, CONNECTICUT

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and the Thames Science Center, New London*

The Pequot-sepos Wildlife Sanctuary

INCORPORATED
MYSTIC, CONNECTICUT

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ROBERT F. KUNZ

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PEQUOT TRAILS

Vol. XVI

November 1964

No. 2

The Coot

The Cover Illustration

The Mystic area residents who frequent the upper reaches of the river in order to feed and observe the ducks were treated to an unusual sight in the past several weeks. Among our hungry feathered friends was a smaller, somewhat shy, "duck."

If you were fortunate enough to get a good view of it you would have noticed it was a Coot. You may know it as Mud Hen, Marsh Hen, Water Chicken or a Mud Coot. These are just a few of the names by which it is known. You may even be in for an argument—hunters and fishermen often mistake the Scoter for a Coot; however the Scoter is definitely a duck—a bird larger than the Coot by some 5 inches. The Scoter's bill is black with a large yellow protuberance at the base. The male is all black—with no white markings like our Coot; the female is sooty-brown.

The American Coot is a member of the Rail family and is classified as *Fulica americana*.

It is a sooty-black, plump bird with a jet-black head and an outstanding white, chicken-like bill, thicker and shorter than those of the surrounding ducks. Its under tail coverts are white.

If you get close enough to it when it is wading, you will notice unusual feet, the toes being fringed by a lobed membrane, as if leaves were stuck to its toes.

It doesn't seem to be out of place with the ducks because it swims and dives as its mallard companions do, but all of its efforts seem less graceful than theirs. Its swimming in pursuit of food is characterized by its tail, constantly flipping up and down—this creates a rough wake. And its take-off requires more distance than a duck's as it skitters along the surface. This observer actually saw it scratch its head, a most unduck-like maneuver. Even when it caught a morsel, its relative shyness would be obvious as it swam farther away to enjoy it.

In reading about this visitor, one is reminded of the expression "silly as

a coot," often claimed to be based on this bird's clumsiness. However, this observer thought it displayed no clumsiness especially when it was out of the water; there, as it walked about, it appeared more at home than the ducks. Perhaps, the fact that it was the only Coot in sight would justify the title of "silly." The Coot, which breeds in the marshes from the northern fringe of the southern states into the Canadian wilds and winters generally south of New England, normally flocks. However, this single individual was probably migrating — on occasion Coots are known to travel singly. Perhaps this fellow isn't so silly after all—with all the food and attention available in the upper Mystic River why would he want to let his whole flock know about it?

As a Service to Members

The Sanctuary has secured from the Connecticut State Department of Fish and Game a generous supply of the hunting, trapping and sport fishing regulations for 1964-1965. They are available at the Trailside Museum. Our purpose in securing these regulations for you is so that you may have for ready reference an easily carried copy of the state laws. For example on page 5, section E, item 6, "THE "FOLLOWING ARE PROHIBITED: Killing hawks, owls, or other birds of prey. Exception: hawks only may be killed when **in act** of destroying poultry." (The boldface is ours.)

Recently several excellent new books have been published on the natural history subjects. Some of these books are not available on a wholesale basis and are therefore not available through normal retail sources. As a service to members the Sanctuary will order these books for individual members without additional charge, excepting postage.

PEQUOT TRAILS

Published three times annually, March, July, and November, by the Pequot-sepos Wildlife Sanctuary, Inc., Mystic, Conn.

A Statement of Purpose:

We want this publication to be of the utmost service to you—to keep you informed concerning activities at the Sanctuary and in your community; to invite your participation in these activities; and to provide you with general articles of education and inspiration regarding conservation subjects.

Robert F. Kunz, Editor
Tel. Mystic 536-9777

Leaf Gall

By Gertrude Ryder Bennett

Upon a leaf I found a gall
As sturdy as a castle wall.
I cut it open with my knife
And watched it throb with insect life.
Beneath a glass that magnified
I saw the throne-room open wide.
Never were fairer robes for kings
Than insects' iridescent wings.
Here were brocade and cloth of gold,
And rainbow tones a thousandfold,
And all the sunsets of the skies
In almost microscopic size;
And yet a gall upon a tree
Is thought a leaf's deformity.

Conservationists Must Speak Up

Each Person's Activities Count

An important state-wide issue concerning thermal pollution of the Connecticut River currently is attracting the attention and efforts of many conservation or wildlife-oriented persons. The response of so many is very encouraging to those leading efforts such as this. Basically this points out the importance of having man's technology used in the best interests of all the people rather than allowing man's technological knowledge to be used without control, and as a result destroy existing natural resources. The response and support of many more is needed if our society is to improve. Our democracy is dedicated to the proposition that the voting majority can decide much better what is best than can a few specialized technicians—be they engineers, lawyers, doctors, or experts in any special field.

The words of Mr. Benjamin Stong, staff member of a U. S. Senate Committee, speaking before a recent national conference, are appropriate:

"Democracy **does** work, in the main, and nearly any individual can, if he tries, have a real influence on the course of legislation. Or he can let vested interests use the machinery for democratic decision-making for selfish ends."

Unless and until our politicians hear the voice and receive the letters of conservationists or wildlife-oriented voters nearby, it is feared that most of the critical political and administrative decisions will be made with little, if any, regard to conservation or wildlife values. The old adage that the squeaking wheel gets the grease should be recalled. If

conservation is to get *fair* and due consideration in the planning decisions being made constantly in our democracy at the town, region, state and national levels, the conservationists must make their voices heard—loud and clear.

One of the best ways to accomplish this goal is to participate in and support the activities of conservation and wildlife organizations such as the Pequot-sepos Wildlife Sanctuary.

Richard M. Bowers

Editor's Note—Mr. Bowers is an officer of the Connecticut Valley Action Committee (CONVAC) for information regarding this organization. Contact him, Old Mystic, Conn.

Thank You

The ladies' workshop building has recently acquired a new coat of stain and trim. We would like to thank the following persons for helping to accomplish this deed. Mr. and Mrs. Hugh L. M. Cole, Mr. Sheridan Cohen and Stephen and David Rusch.

Christmas Bird Count

The annual Christmas bird census sponsored by the National Audubon Society will take place for the New London area on December 27. If you are interested in helping with the census this year please contact Mr. Robert Dewire, Waterford, Connecticut. Telephone 443-6314 after December 19.



Photo by Wilson D. I. Domer

What Is a Natural Area?

Sign at Entrance Trail Perry Natural Area, Stonington, Connecticut.

A natural area can be almost any undeveloped area, large or small, but is preferably one of unusual ecological significance. It may be an area, such as still exist in the western parts of this country, that has been almost unmolested by man, a wilderness type area. It may be an area such as still exists, although rarely, in the eastern part of this country, which has been relatively unmolested by man. It may even be an area that has in the past felt the heavy hand of man's use. Once dedicated, natural areas should continue to be used by man, but his tools from that time forward are the eye, and the mind and the soul, not the tractor, the axe, and the gun. Land and wildlife management practices have no place on a dedicated natural area.

Another type of land conservation, the managed area, may also be almost any piece of undeveloped ground, but differs from the natural area in that it is less often an area of special ecological significance. The most important difference between these two types of land conservation is told by their titles, a natural area is managed only by the forces of nature, a managed area may undergo all kinds of man made management practices.

These two types of land conservation are both of great value as a source of

scientific learning and experimentation, outdoor rest and relaxation, natural history reservoirs, and that special communion that sometimes occurs when man is in harmony with his natural environment, still, they are quite different in the philosophy they represent and in the manner in which they are cared for. **They are never properly the same piece of earth.**

The Sanctuary is fortunate in having both—a managed area in Mystic and thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Harvey C. Perry, a natural area in Stonington.

Activities at the Thames Science Center

The Thames Science Center will hold a color movie from the Bell System Science Series on December 12 at 4 p.m. The title of the movie is "The Restless Sea."

Name The Squirrel Contest. This contest will run from December 1-December 23 and will serve to name a young gray squirrel exhibited at the Center. The contest is open to all and the winning name will be selected by a panel of judges.

The Strand Zone

Along the very edge of the sea there stretches a narrow band of debris called the Strand Zone. In this area, where the tides turn and fall back, are dropped the myriad remains of animal and vegetable life that the sea has produced. Here can be found such a variety of life that books have been written to guide you in identifying the strange things that the sea has stranded. This article will describe a few of the more common creatures to be found on Connecticut beaches.

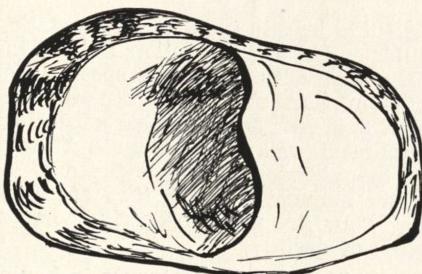
First, a little more about the zone itself: it is actually a banded zone, showing each successive windrow of debris left by the tides, with the heaviest concentration at the level of the mean high tides. If there has been a storm these successive bands are wiped out and there is a wide area of debris, further up on the beach than the normal high tide level.

A closer look at these bands shows them to consist mainly of seaweeds, or

algae, with an intermingling of driftwood and smaller debris. Here and there may be seen the rotting body of a Smooth Skate, Spiny Dogfish, or even an Angler Fish. These are fish usually discarded by fishermen, and even the Herring Gulls, who, although scavengers, leave these fish until last.

Among the seaweed, and scattered to each side of the band it makes, may be seen many varieties of seashells, some empty and bleached white, and some still retaining their colors. Many are broken or worn, but here and there are near-perfect specimens. It is the uncertainty of it all that makes the shell collector's task so interesting to him.

The variety of shelled animals that end up in the Strand Zone is amazing. On recent trips to Connecticut beaches I have found over three dozen familiar species, and several others that I have yet to identify. The following half-dozen are among the most common, but each is very interesting to consider.



The Slipper Shell, *Crepidula fornicata*

This is a fairly common shell, occurring on rocks and other shells in the intertidal range. Because it uses suction to hold on to the surface where it lives, its shell is quite variable in its outline so as to conform to the surface. The living animal can be identified as a brownish or grayish lump, holding tightly to a rock or shell. The empty shell is easily identified by its inner shelf, which gives it a second common name, the Boat Shell. It grows to an average length of two inches.

The Edible Mussel, *Mytilus edulis*

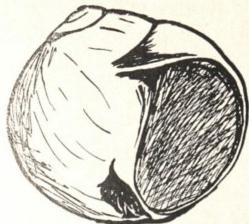
On rocky shores this shell is apt to be the most common one found in the Strand Zone, outdoing all others in volume if not in actual numbers. This mussel is prolific and hardy, and more important, edible. In Europe, where the population concentration is much higher than ours, the edible mussel has been



farmed extensively for food. If you should want to try them, don't be discouraged by their looks . . . the animal inside is not exactly beautiful to look at when considered for food, but then, neither is an oyster. *Mytilus edulis* is excellent when steamed or sautéed in butter with a little wine. The living animal's shell is covered by a brown periostracum, or skin, but after it has weathered on the beach the shell is seen to be quite blue in color; hence another common name, the Blue Mussel. This animal is not variable, being quite uniform in outline and growing to a length of about three inches.

The Moon Snail, *Polineces heros*

The Moon Snail is apt to be found on sandy beaches or muddy shores, where it cruises around the bottom looking for other animals to eat . . . it is a predator, and it operates by engulfing its prey with its huge foot and digesting it within its own shell. The shell washed up on the beach is one of our largest gastropod shells, growing to a diameter of

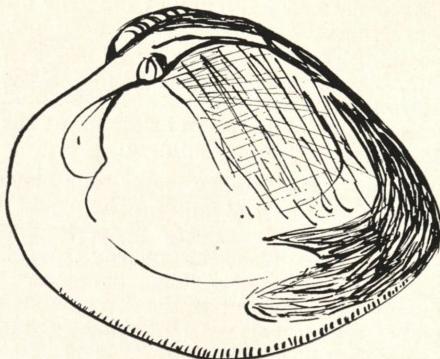


four inches, and is easily identified by its dirty white color, smoothness, and deep umbilicus next to the aperture, or opening.

The Softshelled Clam, *Mya arenaria*

Fifty to seventy-five years ago this clam was ploughed up on the beaches of New England as a staple part of our grandparents' diet. Because of a series of changes so complicated that no one is sure of all the factors involved, it has diminished in number to the point

by the purplish band inside a roughened, heavy shell up to five inches in diameter.



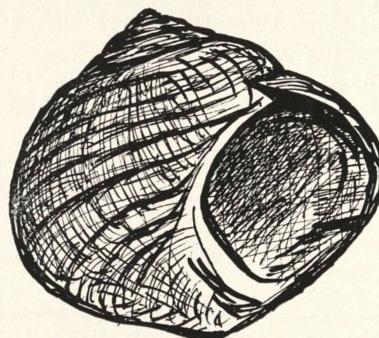
A closer look will also show characteristic small notches, or teeth, along the perimeter of the shell. The purple area, incidentally, was used extensively by the coastal Indians in making wampum.



where it is now regarded as a delicacy, protected by restrictive laws, and approaching lobster in its per-pound price. The shell on the beach is chalky-white, oval in outline, and easily separated from all similar shells by the spondyle, a spoon-shaped projection within the shell near the hinge. It is very thin and fragile, not at all adapted to living where waves dash upon it; so it burrows into the sand to a depth of about 18 inches, extends its siphon to the surface to feed, and withdraws them when danger threatens.

The Quahog, *Mercenaria mercenaria*

Large, thick and rounded in outline, the Quahog, or Hardshelled Clam, is common on muddy bottoms, and has been able to withstand the forces that decimated the ranks of the softshell; thus it is the "clam" in clam chowder. The Quahog lives next to the surface of the mud, being buried almost not at all during warm summer months, and retreating to a depth of about a foot in the winter to escape freezing. The empty shell on the beach is easily identified



wrong? The snail is easily identified by its numbers in the intertidal zone on rocks, other shells, seaweed, in fact on just about everything big enough to hold on to. When the tide is in the Periwinkles cruise about eating algae, and when the tide recedes they exude a mucous secretion that very neatly glues them to whatever spot they happen to pick. This enables them to retreat within their shells and seal the opening with a horny plate called the operculum, thus retaining a moist environment in the midst of a temporary drought. The Periwinkle grows to an average diameter of one inch.

Sunday Morning Walks

The Sanctuary Sunday morning walks take place every Sunday of the year unless otherwise noted, and weather permitting. These trips will take place at 8 a.m. from November 22 to and including March 20, 1965. Unless otherwise noted these walks will always originate at the Sanctuary Museum Building.

Many of the Sunday walks take place on the Sanctuary Mystic property, some on the Sanctuary Perry property and several take place at nearby coastal areas such as Barn Island, particularly during the Winter months. The Sunday walks are a relaxed, informal, group enjoyment of Mother Nature gifts. They provide opportunities for the study of trees, shrubs, ferns, wildflowers, mammals, and insects as well as birds.

Whooping Cranes More Numerous

Washington (AP)—Forty-one whooping cranes—a record number—have been sighted at the Aransas National Wild Life Refuge in Texas, the Interior Department reported.

Among them are ten young cranes, also a record number since the government started keeping its eye on the diminishing species.

The total of adult and young cranes is the highest since 38 birds were sighted in 1961-62.

Visitors to Trailside Museum

Since July 1—5,256.

Same period for 1963—3,672.

Same period for 1962—2,400 (approximate).

DON'T FORGET THE TRAILSIDE LECTURE SERIES!

Still to Come:

January, "Man's Impact on the Southwestern Desert Region," William A. Neiring.

February, "Predation, Prejudice, and Progress," Robert F. Kunz.

March, "Birds in the Landscape," Roland C. Clement.

April, "The Way of a Gull," Louis and Lois Darling.

A complete and descriptive schedule was sent all members in early October.

Membership

Since we last reported to you on this matter, the Sanctuary has continued to increase its membership which is now 774. If the family members of the family memberships are added to this figure the membership is approximately 822. The membership is for obvious reasons vital to the progress and prestige of the Sanctuary. We urge each of our members to encourage their friends and acquaintances to visit the Sanctuary.

November 1964—822 and going up.

November 1963—695 and going up.

November 1962—607 and more or less static.

June 1962—Approximately 600 and going down.

This is progress! Please help us to continue.

Bald Eagle Electrocuted

San Bernardino, Calif., (AP) — A proud bald eagle swooped regally in for a landing on a power line—and wound up bald all over.

The great bird, boasting a 78-inch wingspan, short-circuited himself to death Sunday when he touched two power lines. He also caused a power cutoff for several hours in hundreds of homes in North San Bernardino, North Muscovy and Devore.

Also bald were about 10 acres of brush, ignited by burning feathers from the hapless bird, firemen said.

"Things To Remember"

December 27 — Annual Christmas Bird Census (See Notice This Issue)

December 31 — PSWS New Year's Eve Dance, "Bird Ball"

**January 20 — Trailside Lecture Series
"Man's Impact Upon the Southwest-
ern Desert Region"**

— William A. Niering

**February 14 — Sunday Family Field Trip
"Birds at Our Feeders" at the Trail-
side Museum, 10 a.m.**

**February 17 — Trailside Lecture Series
"Predation, Prejudice, and Progress"**

— Robert F. Kunz

"SOMETHING WE NEED"

A Four Drawer Legal Size File Cabinet

TRADING POST

We want the Trading Post to be a valuable service to you. We need the added support your patronage of the Trading Post will lend to the Sanctuary. We offer our members a discount of 10%-15%. We cannot enumerate all of the items stocked in the Trading Post on this page devoted to advertisement but we will be pleased to discuss them with you personally.

**BIRD—CALLS, HOUSES, FEEDERS, TILES
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and Fields, Along the Sea Shore

NEWLY STOCKED BOOKS

Treasures of the Shore (A Beachcomber's Botany)
The Natural History of North American Amphibians and Reptiles,
Wild Fowl Decoys (a fascinating history of decoys and wild fowl
observation), Exploring Our Natural Wildlife Refuges (an important
book for travelers)

BOOKS OF OUTSTANDING IMPORTANCE

The Quiet Crisis, by Stewart L. Udall
Silent Spring (now available in paperback) by Rachel Carson

WHAT IS THE PEQUOT-SEPOS WILDLIFE SANCTUARY?

The Pequot-sepos Wildlife Sanctuary is a non-profit organization incorporated under the laws of the state of Connecticut for the purpose of promoting a community program of conservation education. The program includes work for the preservation and restoration of our natural resources.

It is a unique community enterprise in that it is supported entirely by interested citizens through memberships and contributions.

YOU AND MEMBERSHIP IN THE PEQUOT-SEPOS WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Members, now totaling over 800, reside in eighteen states and the District of Columbia.

Membership is open to everyone. The present membership includes both amateurs and professionals in natural history subjects and many who recognize the Sanctuary's educational influence in community life.

Five members are elected to the Board of Trustees annually to serve for terms of four years each. The Officers of the Sanctuary are elected annually by the Board of Trustees.

BECOME A MEMBER OR GIVE NOW! All memberships include a subscription to our publications, and have the privilege of participation in all scheduled events.

TAKE AN ACTIVE PART! Opportunities will be offered for participation in field trips, Sanctuary visits, committee work and many other activities.

HERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY to affiliate now with an organization actively engaged in the promotion of a worthy community program of conservation education and recreation.

THE PEQUOT-SEPOS WILDLIFE SANCTUARY:

Maintains 218 acres of land for the purpose of teaching others the ways and values of protection and restoration of our birds, wildlife and other natural resources.

Maintains a trailside museum and a series of nature trails which tell the story of nature in a most instructive and fascinating manner.

In cooperation with the schools, girl scouts, boy scouts, community centers and other youth organizations, promotes a program of conservation education for children.

Conducts a year around program of field trips and activities for members.

Through personal guidance of the Curator, serves as a source of information and help on local and national conservation problems.

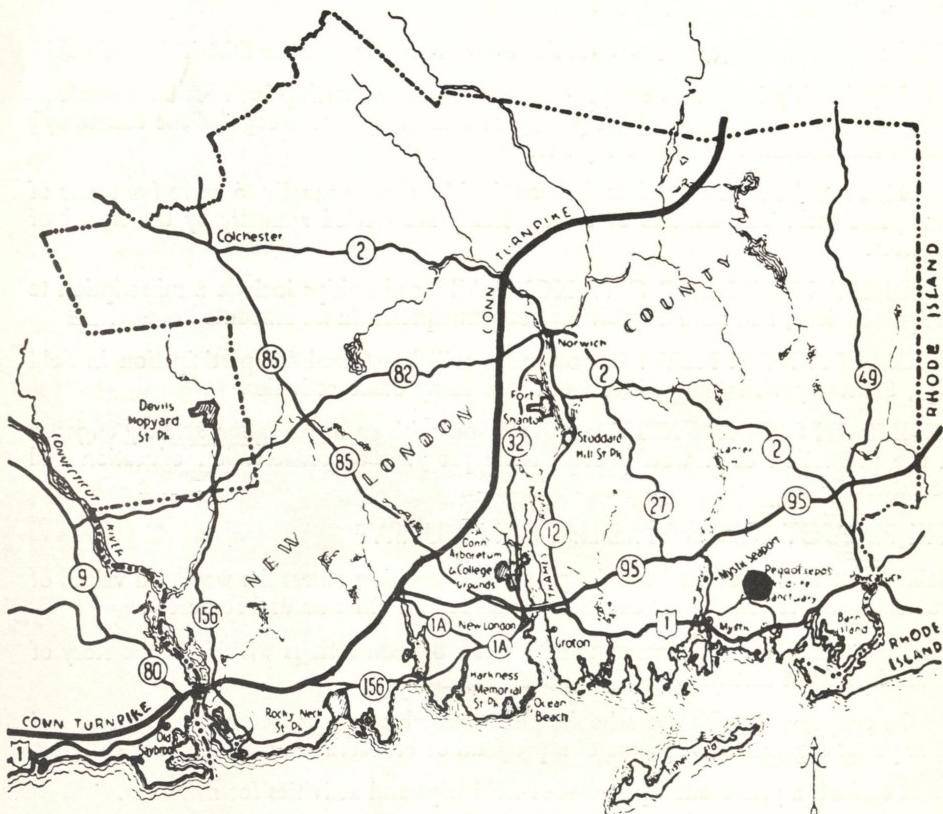
Furnishes information relative to the value of conservation to many individuals and organizations through correspondence, the press, and lectures.

Pursues a long range development program that insures a permanent and increasingly beneficial service to all local communities.

Pequot-sepos Wildlife Sanctuary, Inc.
Mystic, Connecticut

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To reach Sanctuary from east take Route 95 and turn off at Old Mystic sign to Route 27. Turn left and continue to Jerry Brown Road; follow signs to Sanctuary. Or take Route 1 to traffic light at Hewitt Road. Turn right and follow signs.

To reach Sanctuary from west, take Route 95 and bear right on Route 27 at Old Mystic. Continue to Jerry Brown Road and follow signs. Or take Route 1 through Mystic to Post Office, turn left and follow signs.